



ZONED OUT

A sporty, outdoor-loving bachelor enlists a veritable dream team to build his entertaining oasis in the heart of the city.

By Megan Kulick

Photography by Darris Harris

How does a self-described outdoorsman turn a teardown on an alley in Lincoln Park into his dream home? By hiring Maria Segal and Richard Blender of Blender Architecture (blenderarchitecture.com) and Mia Rao of Mia Rao Design (miraodesign.com). The main priority was to have a fully integrated indoor-outdoor floor plan with plenty of room for entertaining, but the lot's awkward location on a corner was a blessing (full southern exposure satisfied the owner's request for lots of sunlight) and a curse (it offered nothing for privacy).

The team solved the problem by executing three outdoor areas: a patio off the kitchen, a roof deck above the garage and another roof deck on the third story of the house. "For the patio off the kitchen, we played with how the house met the ground plane," says Segal. "We raised the terrace off grade so it's only four steps down from the indoor kitchen, which also creates fewer

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A custom geometric screen made of rusted CorTen steel is a focal point in this multilevel outdoor space designed by Blender Architecture and Mia Rao Design. Wispy grasses and light blue are a theme continued throughout, coordinating with the interiors of the home.

From top: The third-level deck is split into two by the interior office with one side offering a quiet sunbathing nook; a casual dining area provides overflow for the homeowner's frequent parties.



...CONTINUED stairs up to the garage roof deck. We wanted to achieve a connected, continuous flow, and that effect has a lot to do with proximity." The result is a patio that feels like a natural extension of the kitchen.

Subtle nods to the home's interior design are referenced throughout the outdoor area, such as a geometric screen made of rusted CorTen steel inspired by a wall of striking blue Heath Ceramics tiles in the kitchen. It creates a unique focal point while uniting the space and camouflaging the garage wall. A large dining table easily accommodates dinner parties, while a nearby lounge area is frequently used for cocktails. Custom blue seat cushions add a pop of color to the overall muted space. "Blues are a theme around the house—our client loves the color, and it goes well with the warm elements of wood and metal found throughout," says Rao. The team brought in Larry Asimow of Larry Asimow Landscaping to install the delicate trees and wispy grasses that surround the blue stone patio. All of the plantings were chosen to withstand full sun, since there is no shade structure by request of the summer-loving homeowner.

The ipe wood garage deck, built by Sturm Builders, continues into a slatted wall that allows light to come through while hiding the alley view. CONTINUED...



From top: The roof of the garage was transformed into a cozy outdoor lounge with built-in seating, comfortable chairs and a custom fire table; the main level of the space, off the interior kitchen, provides an outdoor living room and formal dining area with a long harvest table. Custom planters with tall wispy grasses line the perimeter.

...CONTINUED “Creating an outdoor space that feels like a room provides a sense of protection and enclosure within the cityscape,” Segal says. All of the outdoor spaces are wired for sound with hidden speakers, and the exterior walls of the house are frequently used to project Cubs games on.

“Originally, the house was going to be two stories. Then we had the idea to pop up in the middle with a treehouse to accommodate the office, allowing the owner to have a light-flooded workspace with quick access to the outdoors,” Blender explains. Because of the treehouse, the top deck is naturally split into two zones—one that’s more intimate, while the other is more social. Lounge chairs, oversize planters and a pub table allow for casual socializing. “The goal was to have comfortable furniture that worked with the layout. The pub table on the top deck made sense because it’s more of a hangout space, versus the patio, where sit-down dining takes place,” Rao says. The second zone, on the other side of the deck, houses an outdoor shower and a hot tub. “Out here, it can feel like California in Chicago,” says Blender. “On a chilly day, you hot tub outside and then warm up by the fire.” The space as a whole is comprised of various zones that make you feel comfortable in any season. Blender adds, “It’s a place where you just naturally want to be.” ■

